

THE UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO
POLITICAL STATUS ACT—H.R. 856**HON. NEIL ABERCROMBIE**

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 25, 1998

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 856, the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act. My decision to support this legislation is based on my experiences in Puerto Rico and as a Member representing the last state to be admitted to the union. Not only do I believe the referendum mandated under this legislation to be in accord with the will of the people of Puerto Rico—I also believe it is morally incumbent upon the Congress to move the self-determination process along. The United States cannot declare itself to be the capital of the free world when it denies the fundamental principles of democracy to a group of its citizens.

Let me be clear, this legislation is not a statehood bill. It allows Puerto Ricans the right to express their own views about their island's destiny through an initial non-binding referendum. The next step in the process would require the aspirations of the majority of the people of Puerto Rico to be reviewed and approved by the President of the United States and the Congress. A change in status to either statehood or independence would actually require three island-wide majority votes, three congressional approvals, and a prudent transition period of ten years. Certainly much more thought, review, and revision would follow an approval of this legislation by the House of Representatives. However, we can at least do our duty as Members of Congress by providing the people of Puerto Rico with the opportunity to undertake the process.

All the political conjecture about this legislation—"it creates an artificial majority in favor of statehood," or "new Members of Congress from Puerto Rico will join the Democratic Party," or "the definition of Commonwealth is unfair," or "Puerto Rico will be America's Quebec," are all just that—conjecture. No one really knows what will result from this legislation, no one can predict the future. The lesson learned when Alaska and Hawaii joined the union as the 49th and 50th states bears this out. The political soothsayers of the day determined that Alaska would have a Democratic delegation and Hawaii would be Republican. As we all know, today the exact opposite is true. We cannot determine the future of Puerto Rico by voting for H.R. 856. However, we can stop the conjecture and begin the work it will take to give Puerto Ricans the ability to determine their own future.

I would also like to address the question of English as the official language. As a legislator who supported the inclusion of Hawaiian and English as official languages of the State of Hawaii, I am proud to say that the recognition of both languages has been a benefit to our islands, not a deficiency. Children who attend Hawaiian immersion schools actually score higher in English and other academic disciplines than their classmates who do not have the reference point of a second language. By encouraging the study and knowledge of more than one language, the children discover a deeper meaning to their studies. They have a cultural reference point that chil-

dren without the knowledge of their native language lack.

Bilingualism is an asset—let us continue to encourage it in Hawaii and also Puerto Rico. A rich and unique cultural history should not divide Puerto Rico from the rest of the United States. A rich and unique cultural history defines who Puerto Ricans are today. Let us pass H.R. 856 and allow Puerto Ricans to define who they are and where they want to be in the future.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

HON. RON KIND

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 25, 1998

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, there is one more day left before this House debates campaign finance reform. This is our opportunity to reform the broken political process. Unfortunately, this opportunity is being wasted because the leadership of the House has chosen to submit a bill, H.R. 3485, that stands no chance of passing. There are a wide variety of good bills pending in this body that provide real options for fixing our broken system, the leadership should allow the members an opportunity to consider those bills.

Regardless of where each member of Congress stands on the issue of campaign finance reform we all share one goal, promoting citizen involvement in the electoral process. The bill we will vote on tomorrow actually restricts citizen involvement by amending the Motor Voter Act and adding burdensome rules to verify citizenship among voters. These provisions will result in a chilling effect on voting. We need to do more to encourage voter participation, rather than discouraging it.

Mr. Speaker, the solution to this dilemma is simple, allow an open rule that gives every campaign finance proposal, including the Bipartisan Freshman Integrity Act, a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives.

THE DRIVER RECORD INFORMATION
VERIFICATION SYSTEM
ACT—THE DRIVERS ACT**HON. JAMES P. MORAN**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 25, 1998

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, this morning, with my colleagues CONNIE MORELLA, ZOE LOFGREN, HENRY WAXMAN, NICK LAMPSON, and NITA LOWEY, we are introducing the Driver Record Information Verification System Act or DRIVERS Act for short.

This legislation is being introduced in response to the tragic and senseless death of a local and promising young student Benjamin Cooper. Last summer, a commercial truck driver with a lengthy record of driving violations, at least 22 in the past year and at least 31 over the past ten years, was permitted to get behind the wheel and continue to drive. On August 12th, the truck driver ran a red light, overturned and crashed into the car driven by Ben Cooper.

The Washington Post in a September 3rd editorial correctly asked, "What Kept Him (this

truck driver) on the Road?" My own involvement on this issue began on August 25th, when I received a letter from one of Ben's classmates, Lester Feder who asked me to help develop a national database to ensure that drivers with a history of reckless behavior and numerous driving violations cannot obtain a new license. I very much appreciated Mr. Feder's letter and his efforts to add meaning to Ben Cooper's death by working to prevent a similar tragedy from ever occurring again.

As I looked into the tragic circumstances in more detail, I was shocked to learn how easily someone can exploit loopholes in the current driver registration system to obtain a new, clean license that can effectively wipe out any past driving violations. This appears to be what may have occurred with the driver of the truck who killed Ben Cooper. The most significant problem with the present system is that there are fifty different systems and databases for personal driver licenses, one for each state, and one incomplete national system for commercial driver licenses.

Unfortunately, these separate systems are often incompatible and cannot communicate with each other, requiring records to be updated manually. Moreover, not all states are doing a good job at coordinating and sharing information on bad drivers. Courts and law enforcement officers routinely lack information on a past driver's record prior to sentencing someone with a reckless or DWI (driving while intoxicated) charge. And, in turn, they lack a user-friendly system for transmitting their convictions to all fifty states.

Only five states operate a database that can be shared electronically with other states. Forty five states transmit update information to other states by paper. Needless to say coordination among the states on current driver record information is sporadic and inefficient. Records are often incomplete and not updated on a timely basis.

Anyone motivated to hide their past record of violations can obtain a new license in a different state and obtain a clean driving record. To make matters worse, the commercial driver license information system, which was designed to establish a national database on commercial drivers only covers a small portion of the total driving population. Advancements in information management technologies, however, offers the promise of a simple easy to manage, real-time national database that can retrieve, update and manage a national database on the nation's 200 million licensed drivers.

Only with a national database that includes both personal and commercial driver license information can we effectively thwart those who seek to hide their past records. Permitting this new system to use social security numbers, something now permitted with the commercial drivers' license system, will also make it more difficult to alter one's name or identity. The ease and potential cost savings of a national system offers the promise that all states will seek voluntarily to join the national system.

Before we reach that stage, however, we must test its feasibility of the new system. The legislation we are introducing today, takes this first step by authorizing \$5 million for the U.S. Department of Transportation to work with several states to develop this national database. Once the bugs in the new system are resolved, and I believe they can be, we can